

Security Cooperation and Irregular Warfare

Understanding the relationship and differentiating the objectives

by LtCol Chris B. Jackson



We must have clear objectives when operating with partner nations. (Photo by 1stLt Caleb D. Eames.)

Confusion has developed within the Marine Corps regarding the relationship between security cooperation (SC) and irregular warfare (IW). Recently this confusion was illustrated by the reference to Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG) as an IW organization in a task to consolidate perceived IW organizations. However, according to the fiscal year 2010 Marine Corps Campaign Support Plan, MCTAG is an SC-enabling organization, as are other organizations consid-

>LtCol Jackson is currently the Operations and Training Branch Head, Security Cooperation Education and Training Center, where he manages partner-nation SC assessments and plans and is a primary developer and instructor at the SC Planners Course.

ered for consolidation under an IW umbrella. This relational confusion may result in negative consequences, impacting our global partnerships and institutional reputation. This article aims to provide a better understanding of the SC and IW relationship in order

to foster informed decisionmaking. First, we must clearly define the two terms. This clarification is not only to differentiate between the two but, more importantly, to clarify objectives and end states of our partner-nation engagements today and in the future.

IW is defined as:

... a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.¹

An IW environment requires greater focus on military operations, including stability operations, counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, and unconventional warfare.² By definition an IW environment exists when one or a combination of the aforementioned operations is conducted primarily to (re)establish order in a fragile state.³ However, this does not mean that these operations exist exclusively in an IW environment. These operations also occur in the environments of security, stabilization, transition, reconstruction, and major combat operations.

SC is defined as:

... all Department of Defense [DoD] interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.⁴

SC aims to achieve national strategic objectives through relationships, generational change, access, and capability and capacity building. There are several well-defined subsets of SC, including security assistance and security force assistance. Security assistance is the DoD-administered portion of the State Department's Foreign Assistance Program encompassing foreign military sales and international military education training.⁵ Security force assistance, as recently promulgated in DoD policy, has the primary role of developing partner-nation capabilities and/or capacity.⁶

The confusion stems from DoD and Marine Corps emphasis on both SC ac-

tivities and IW operations concurrently. Recently IW has simply and incorrectly been used as an overarching term covering all types of activities and operations outside of a conventional conflict environment. Indeed, in some cases SC activities support IW operations, but the two are distinct, and their relationship must be clearly defined.

In 2009 the Republic of Georgia committed to providing troops in support of the NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The Marine Corps supported this mission by providing equipment and deploying hundreds of Marines as trainers and facilitators from across the Operating Forces and Supporting Establishment on the Georgia Deployment Program (GDP). The GDP was designed to assist the Georgian Armed Forces with predeployment training to facilitate interoperability and the ability to control battlespace in multinational operations, in this case Afghanistan. The program is directed by Marine Forces Europe, primarily facilitated and coordinated by MCTAG, and supported by the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center and Marine Corps Systems Command International Programs. Is the GDP a form of IW or an SC activity supporting current multinational operations in an IW environment? The following discussion will clearly answer the question.

SC planning is one of the three types of joint strategic planning; the other two are force planning and joint operation planning.⁷ SC planning focuses on steady-state, shaping activities spanning across the range of military operations and operational environments. Steady-state planning covers ongoing operations and preventative activities, while shaping includes routine military and interagency activities performed to deter potential adversaries and to solidify relationships.⁸ As a result of the *Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF)*-directed paradigm shift from contingency-centric planning to strategy-centric planning, contingency plans are no longer the base plans, but rather a branch of the steady-state, shaping

base plans. With this shift in emphasis, the role of SC is becoming more prominent. From a global perspective, combatant commands can conduct SC shaping activities to create effects within or across theaters using day-to-day SC and Phase 0 activities.⁹ The *GEF* identifies 15 SC engagement categories, including distinguished visitor orientation tours, military-to-military engagement, international students, foreign military sales, bilateral/multilateral exercises, subject matter expert exchanges, humanitarian assistance, research and development, and train, advise, and assist activities.¹⁰

Within this context, conducting the GDP serves four purposes. It allows a partner nation to assist the United States in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Second, it develops the capability of a partner nation to perform out-of-country operations. Third, preparing Georgian Armed Forces for combat operations in Afghanistan develops their capability and capacity for self-defense and assists with regional stability in the Caucasus. Fourth, it facilitates U.S. access to the Caucasus region. All of these objectives are achieved through SC-specific activities. The GDP is SC conducted in support of a multinational operation in an IW environment in Afghanistan. The program is funded using foreign military sales case monies, builds partner-nation capability, is steady-state, and satisfies not only theater objectives but also national strategic objectives. Further, the skills received apply across the range of military operations and all environments, not just in an IW environment. Had the GDP training been conducted to support the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, it would have been in support of major combat operations, not IW.

Ultimately IW is a broadly defined concept relating to an operational *environment*, while SC is a set of *programs* defined in *Title 10* and *Title 22* laws utilized to build relationships, develop partner-nation capabilities, and advance U.S. interests. IW is just *one* of the contingency-related environments in which SC activities can sup-



Security cooperation is an effective tool we can use to achieve our national interests. (Photo by Sgt Dean Davis.)

port the achievement of national and theater objectives. Further, SC is a collection of programs persistently utilized in steady-state and shaping activities to build partner-nation capability and capacity across the range of military operations and *all* environments. Last, SC is not becoming en vogue because of the current focus on IW. Rather, SC is one of the most effective and critical tools to achieving national strategic objectives. The GDP is one of many programs executed by the Marine Corps with partner-nation forces, and these programs cannot be categorically assigned under the IW umbrella.

What are the implications for the Marine Corps? First, all Marines must understand the relationship, both differences and similarities, between SC

and IW because this will define how the Marine Corps operates in the future. Second, history has shown a cycle in which the U.S. military shifts focus between major combat operations and operations other than war. Consequently, the myopic view of merging SC and IW for potential short-term gains, thus further confusing the relationship, will have immediate and lasting negative consequences on partner-nation perceptions. What message will we be sending to our partner nations? Will the Marine Corps be conducting a form of IW when it welcomes officers from Australia and India at Command and Staff College or when we conduct amphibious training with British forces? Third, SC programs will continue to shape and influence the steady-state environment by

building partner-nation capabilities and capacity, assuring access, and mitigating instability through regional security in the future regardless of what operations or environments it is supporting.

Currently the Marine Corps and its defined SC-enabling organizations are well respected and are at the forefront driving SC concepts, policy, doctrine, planning, and execution across DoD. Considering today's strategic environment and anticipated future battlefield environments, the Marine Corps must insulate its SC programs and activities from being perceived as exclusively IW. SC activities are persistent efforts built on relationships that can be conducted across the range of military operations and environments that expand well beyond an IW setting. As a Service that prides itself on institutional agility, the Marine Corps should not limit the focus of its SC efforts to the IW environment.

Notes

1. *Joint Publication 1-02 (JP 1-02), DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, as amended through April 2010, Joint Staff, Washington, DC, p. 242.
2. *DoD Directive 3000.7, Irregular Warfare*, Washington, DC, 1 December 2008, p. 2.
3. Ibid.
4. *JP 1-02*, p. 416.
5. *DoD Directive 5132.03, DoD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, Washington, DC, 24 October 2008, p. 1.
6. *DoD Instruction 5000.68, Security Force Assistance*, Washington, DC, 27 October 2010, p. 2.
7. *JP 3-0, Joint Operations*, incorporating change 2, Joint Staff, Washington, DC, 22 March 2010, p. IV-1.
8. *GEF (Draft) 2010 (GEF 10)*, Officer of the Secretary of Defense, Undersecretary for Policy, Washington, DC.
9. *JP 5-0, Joint Operations Planning*, Joint Staff, Washington, DC, 26 December 2006, p. IV-35.
10. *GEF 10*.

